REPRESENTATIVE FOR
CHILDREN AND YOUTH

Office of the
Representative for Children and Youth

Service Plan
2009/10 to 2011/12

Message from the Representative for Children and Youth

I am pleased to present the 2009/10 to 2011/12 service plan for the Office of the Representative for Children and Youth. It has been just over 18 months since I assumed the newly created position of Representative, and it has been a rewarding and challenging period.

Our first service plan set out goals and objectives relating to establishing our presence as a new independent office to serve vulnerable children and youth.

This new service plan builds on what we are learning through the partnerships and relationships my Office is developing. This plan also builds on what we are hearing from children, youth, service providers, the business community and government, on ways to work together toward positive change that truly makes the lives of young British Columbians better.

An intensely concentrated and rewarding opportunity for this listening, learning and exchange was our recent 2008 Champions for Children and Youth Summit in Vancouver. Over 300 delegates and speakers from around the world and across the province joined together for two very full days. We look forward to drawing on the valuable lessons learned from the Summit, and building on them in the coming year.

Our three office locations throughout the province – Prince George, Burnaby and Victoria – are now fully operational and providing increased access by children and youth to the support offered by my experienced and dedicated staff. We are honoured to provide outreach, advocacy, information and support to children, youth, families and caregivers province-wide.

Over the coming months, we will continue to reach out to communities to build awareness about how my Office can help children and youth ensure their voices are heard, and their rights and interests protected and upheld.

We will also continue to engage in extensive outreach to community organizations to assist them in providing advocacy support to children and youth in their communities. Outreach, engagement and support to Aboriginal communities and organizations are particularly critical in light of the extremely challenging circumstances facing many Aboriginal children and youth in our province.

As an independent body with oversight responsibilities, I will continue to monitor and evaluate the child-serving system and advocate for improvements to government services to ensure that children are protected and safe. To be effective in this role, our work will continue to be objective, evidence-based and at all times child-centred.

As part of my monitoring function I will continue to assess and push for government accountability in implementing the spirit and intent of the Hughes Review.

My Office will also continue its focus on promoting a government-wide commitment to accountability, in order to better and more accurately understand the impact of services and programs on children and youth. This is essential in optimizing the allocation of funding to those programs that are most effective. I will continue to champion the adoption of a non-partisan made-in-B.C. Children's Plan, that sets out overarching goals and intended outcomes for our children and youth – a common direction that all who work in the system of care for children and youth can work towards, to ensure we stay focused on always ensuring a better tomorrow for our children.

In coming years, this focus on accountability will be essential, as experience shows that social issues and challenges generally increase in tough economic times. I plan to carefully monitor the impact of the recent downturn in the economy, and its potential to have very real consequences for vulnerable children throughout the province by impacting their opportunities for development.

I am encouraged and honoured by the support of British Columbians for the work of my Office. Our children are our future, and the better path we build for them today – whether helping one child at a time, or improving the overall system of supports – means a better path for our province tomorrow.

Sincerely,

Mary Ellen Turpel-Lafond
Representative for Children and Youth

November 2008

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Overview of the Office

Establishment of the Representative for Children and Youth

In April 2006, the Hon. Ted Hughes, Q.C., released the BC Children and Youth Review. The recommendations of his independent review of the child protection system were publicly endorsed by both the British Columbia government and the Official Opposition.

The Hughes Review called for sweeping changes to the child- and youth-serving system in the province. A central recommendation was to establish an external, independent body that would report publicly to the Legislative Assembly through a select standing committee on children and youth. The Review recommended that this body perform two key functions. A primary function would be the promotion and coordination of advocacy services for children and youth. The Review found a strong consensus that children, youth and their families needed support, advice, information and assistance in accessing and resolving conflicts with the child- and youth-serving system. The Hughes Review called for this new body to advocate for the interests, rights and views of children and youth. Mr. Hughes believed that, over time, the resolution of individual cases would help identify causes of recurring problems and offer constructive resolutions for improvement. As well, he recommended that the independent body push for change to the system from an informed but external perspective.

Mr. Hughes also called for this proposed new body to monitor and review the performance of the child- and youth-serving system and publicly report on its effectiveness and responsiveness. The objective was clear: to improve outcomes for children and youth accessing the child- and youth-serving system in areas such as child safety, permanency placement, adoption and education. As part of its monitoring function, the external body would review certain deaths and critical injuries of children and youth who were in care at the time, or who had been receiving child and youth services during the preceding year, with a goal of helping prevent the recurrence of similar injuries or deaths in the future.

While the Hughes Review recommended a monitoring role for the external body, it noted that most government ministries are not subject to formal oversight by an external body and in the future, there may be no need for an independent oversight body. If government's own performance measurement, quality assurance programs and public reporting were to become sufficient to assure the public that vulnerable children and youth are being protected as they should be, there may be no need for such a body. The Hughes Review proposed a review of the Office's oversight responsibility in five years and suggested it be revised as appropriate at that time.

The provincial government moved to adopt and implement some of these recommendations, including a five-year review.

In May 2006, the *Representative for Children and Youth Act* was passed. In November 2006, a special committee of the Legislative Assembly recommended the appointment of Judge Mary Ellen Turpel-Lafond as Representative for Children and Youth for a five-year term. This appointment was unanimously approved by the Legislative Assembly in December 2006.

In May 2008 an amendment to the Act was passed authorizing the Representative additional powers of disclosure.

Vision

An organization highly valued for championing the fundamental rights of vulnerable children and youth, and for promoting improvements in the delivery of services to children, youth and their families that result in better lives for children and youth.

Mandate

Functions of representative

6 The representative is responsible for performing the following functions in accordance with this Act:

(a) support, assist, inform and advise children and their families respecting designated services, which activities include, without limitation,

(i) providing information and advice to children and their families about how to effectively access designated services and how to become effective self-advocates with respect to those services,

(ii) advocating on behalf of a child receiving or eligible to receive a designated service, and

(iii) supporting, promoting in communities and commenting publicly on advocacy services for children and their families with respect to designated services;

(b) monitor, review, audit and conduct research on the provision of a designated service by a public body or director for the purpose of making recommendations to improve the effectiveness and responsiveness of that service, and comment publicly on any of these functions;

(c) review, investigate and report on the critical injuries and deaths of children as set out in Part 4;

(d) perform any other prescribed functions.

The mandate of the Representative for Children and Youth includes the following:

1) **Advocacy** – the Representative

- provides information, advice and support to children, youth and their families who need help in dealing with "designated services" under the child- and youth-serving system, ensures the rights and interests of children and youth are protected and upheld, and their views heard and considered by decision makers;
- promotes and encourages self-advocacy and development of community advocacy organizations through outreach, information, education and support;
- builds awareness, engagement and capacity at the community level in supporting and assisting the healthy development of children, youth and their families; and
- advocates for changes to the child- and youth-serving system itself to improve its effectiveness and responsiveness.

The child- and youth-serving system includes ***designated services***, which means any of the following services or programs for children and their families provided under an enactment or provided or funded by government:

a) services or programs under the *Adoption Act*, the *Child, Family and Community Service Act*, the *Community Living Authority Act* and the *Youth Justice Act*;
b) early childhood development and child care services;
c) mental health services for children;
d) addiction services for children;
e) services for youth and young adults during their transition to adulthood;
f) additional service or programs prescribed by regulation under the *Representative for Children and Youth Act*.

2) **Monitor, Review and Audit** – the Representative monitors and evaluates designated child and youth services and makes recommendations to improve the effectiveness and responsiveness of these services. The Representative reports publicly on monitoring, review and audit activities, including issuing reports on the implementation of recommendations made in these reports endorsed by the Select Standing Committee on Children and Youth.

3) **Research, Data Collection and Analysis** – the Representative conducts evidence-based research and assessment for the purpose of making recommendations to better inform the development and delivery of child and youth services and improve results in the areas of safety, health, education and well-being for vulnerable children and youth in the Province. The Office collaborates with other public bodies, and agencies and post-secondary institutions in conducting these activities and may produce reports, including joint reports, outlining the findings and conclusions of these efforts. The Representative supports and facilitates the transfer of knowledge related to these findings to front-line service providers.

4) **Review and Investigate Critical Injuries and Deaths of Children** – the Representative receives reports on critical injuries and deaths of children or youth receiving specified "reviewable services". The Representative conducts reviews for the purpose of identifying and analyzing recurring circumstances or trends, to inform improvements to services and to aid in the prevention of similar injuries or deaths in the future. Further, the Representative may investigate the critical injury or death of an individual child or youth. The Representative initiates an investigation when the circumstances of the injury or death are suspicious, self-inflicted or when there is a question as to whether neglect, abuse or services the child received may have played a role in events leading to the injury or death. The Representative produces individual case reports and reports that aggregate and analyze the information received from reviews and from investigations conducted. Where the Representative conducts an investigation into a critical injury or death of a child or youth, the Representative must produce a report on the investigation.

Reviewable services – are services or programs under the *Child, Family and Community Service Act* and the *Youth Justice Act*; mental health services for children; addiction services for children; and additional "designated services" that may be designated under a Regulation.

Fulfilling Our Mandate

To be effective in achieving our mandate, the Office must have the confidence and trust of the public. Public confidence and trust are created in three ways: 1) by the legislated independence of the Representative and her Office; 2) by the integrity and effectiveness of the Office in carrying out its duties and responsibilities; and 3) by a child-centred focus on supporting children and youth.

Our Office has been provided with the necessary attributes of independence through the *Representative for Children and Youth Act*, which provides the Representative with independent powers of review, investigation, monitoring and reporting. The Office reports to the Legislative Assembly, and to the Select Standing Committee on Children and Youth, and the Representative is appointed by a unanimous vote of the Legislative Assembly for an initial term of five years.

The effectiveness of our Office is dependent on how we carry out our duties and responsibilities. The Representative has approved a Code of Conduct and Ethics that requires the highest standards of ethical and professional behaviour.

We are open and transparent in our conduct; we work in a collegial and collaborative way with all those involved in providing services to children and youth; and we remain determined to achieve better outcomes for vulnerable young people. In our interaction with children and youth we are respectful, friendly, clear and easy to approach; we are calm, helpful and empathetic; and we ensure that young people feel safe and protected in all their dealings with us.

Our Office earns and maintains respect and credibility by undertaking thorough analysis and demonstrating understanding of complex issues. Operating in this way, we enhance the integrity and credibility of the Office without inhibiting the Office's independence or its responsibility to constructively criticize aspects of the child- and youth-serving system, when such criticism is warranted.

In our reporting relationship with the Legislative Assembly of British Columbia and the Select Standing Committee on Children and Youth, the Representative endeavors to build a greater understanding of B.C.'s child- and youth-serving system among legislators and the public. The Representative plays a vital role in encouraging a non-partisan approach by all in order to address challenges facing the system and take advantage of opportunities to improve it.

We are guided in the performance of our responsibilities by the rights of children and youth as reflected in:

- the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, which was signed by Canada in 1991 following endorsement by unanimous resolution of the British Columbia Legislature;
- the *Child, Family and Community Service Act*; and
- the Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

Focus on Aboriginal Peoples

Aboriginal children and youth are over-represented in B.C.'s child protection system, under-represented in many systems of support, and often face challenges that result in extreme vulnerabilities. Supporting and assisting Aboriginal children and youth is a particular focus of our Office.

This includes engaging with, collaborating with and establishing partnerships with Aboriginal communities to deliver outreach and advocacy services and to support initiatives that improve results for Aboriginal children and youth. We work to do this in a way that respects the unique sense of place, culture, language and community of Aboriginal peoples. We support collaborative work with provincial, federal and Aboriginal governments in addressing issues related to Aboriginal children and youth receiving government services.

The ***United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child*** sets out the basic human rights of children everywhere: the right to survival; to develop to the fullest; to protection from harmful influences, abuse and exploitation; and to participate fully in family, cultural and social life. The four core principles of the Convention are non-discrimination, devotion to the best interests of the child, the right to life, survival and development, and respect for the views of the child. Every right spelled out in the Convention is inherent to the human dignity and harmonious development of every child. The Convention protects children's rights by setting standards in health care, education, and legal, civil and social services.

Strategic Context

Many young people in British Columbia grow up in homes that are safe and secure, and they are healthy and have good circumstances for development. However, many children and youth experience circumstances that are not optimal, and they have poorer outcomes for their health, safety and well-being.

Poverty, addictions, abuse, neglect, living outside the parental home or coping with special needs can all contribute to less stability and hope for their future. Strong systems of support ensure these children do as well as other children.

Achieving better results for vulnerable children and youth includes understanding the interrelationship and impact of social, economic, cultural, educational and environmental factors on children's development and their overall health and well-being.

Challenges and Opportunities

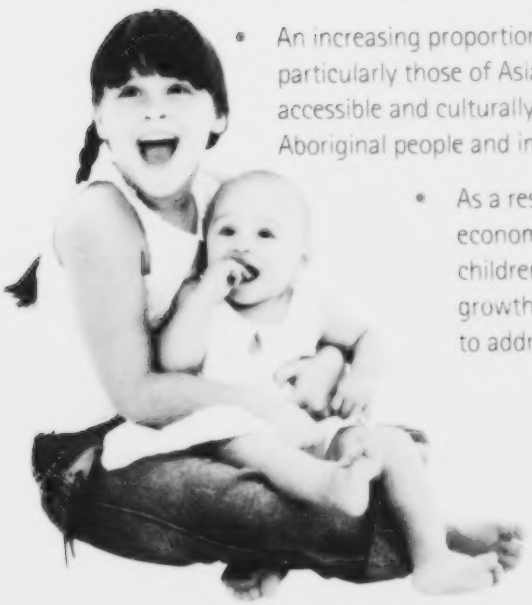
- Children and youth who are in care or out of the parental home, including those receiving services from the child- and youth-serving system are more vulnerable than the general population. They are less likely to be healthy or educated, and more likely to live in poverty, experience family violence and/or sexual and emotional abuse, have a higher incidence of special needs and developmental disabilities, have a higher incidence of behavioural issues or mental illness, experience a higher level of incarceration, and have a higher rate of dependence on income assistance.

Vulnerable children

The Representative focuses particular attention on vulnerable children and youth across British Columbia throughout their development – from maternal fetal health through to adulthood. A child's optimal development depends on a number of factors including those relating to their birth, development and environment. Aboriginal children face unique vulnerabilities due to historic and ongoing barriers to service and jurisdictional disputes over which level of government serves them.

These children need protection and support in order to overcome these challenges and reach their full potential.

- Aboriginal children and youth are much more likely to be clients of the child-serving system. Only eight per cent of B.C.'s child and youth population are Aboriginal, but more than 50 per cent of children and youth in care are Aboriginal. The number of children and youth in care declined by about 11 per cent over the five-year period between 2000/01 and 2005/06, while the number of Aboriginal children and youth in care increased. In B.C., about 1 in 20 Aboriginal children are in care, while only 1 in 100 of the total B.C. child and youth population are in care. About 40 per cent of youth in custody in the youth justice system are Aboriginal.
- There is an increasing demand for responsive and effective services for children and youth with special needs and their families. This is attributed to increased survival rates for children and youth with special needs, improved diagnoses and greater awareness of our responsibility to support all children in an inclusive fashion.
- While government has adopted the Hughes Review recommendations, which are intended to strengthen the child- and youth-serving system, little is known of outcomes achieved for children in the child-serving system. An ongoing challenge is how to improve this.
- The population structure of British Columbia is changing toward an older, more ethnically diverse one. In the foreseeable future, an increasing number of elderly will be supported by a decreasing number of young earners. Continued and growing pressure on the health care system has the potential to significantly impact the availability of provincial funds for other social services, including services to children, youth and their families.
- An increasing proportion of children and youth will be Aboriginal or new immigrants, particularly those of Asian descent. This underscores the importance of building accessible and culturally appropriate services that effectively meet the needs of Aboriginal people and immigrant populations.
- As a result of the global economic downturn, the growth of the B.C. economy has slowed. This slowdown has implications for services to children, youth and their families because times of slower economic growth can sometimes mean decreased focus and resources dedicated to addressing the needs of the most vulnerable in our society.



Goals, Objectives, Strategies and Performance Measures

Goals

The Office of the Representative for Children and Youth has four main goals:

1. Vulnerable children and youth have their rights and interests protected and upheld, their voices are heard and considered, and they are active participants in decisions affecting them;
2. The work of the Office supports improved outcomes for vulnerable children and youth, and progress from year to year in supporting optimal developmental milestones;
3. The work of the Office supports the right of children to be safe from violence, abuse, neglect, and exposure to familial violence; and
4. The Office delivers its mandate in a child-centred, open, collaborative, accountable and responsive way.

Objectives, Strategies and Performance Measures[1]

Goal 1 – Vulnerable children and youth have their rights and interests protected and upheld, their voices are heard and considered, and they are active participants in decisions affecting them

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Objective 1.1 – British Columbians are informed of and understand the rights of children and youth, and are aware of services available to support vulnerable children and youth

Strategies

We will:

- inform and educate children and youth about the advocacy support and advice provided by our Office and how to access it, and actively promote the services available to support vulnerable children and youth;

[1] The performance measures in this plan are essentially measures of outputs – quantity of services delivered, level of activity, children and youth served and satisfaction with services. These are useful as performance indicators providing a measure of effort in terms of measuring activities. Outcomes – the assessment of the result or benefit of the program on the child or youth – are more difficult to quantify. The Office is developing a mechanism to measure our effect – the impact of our efforts on changing the lives for the better of vulnerable children and youth. It is intended the method for assessing the impact of the Office, its mandate and functions will be included in a plan currently under development.

- disseminate publications, and host presentations and workshops in communities with community and child and youth organizations about the rights of children and youth;
- work with community partners to build understanding and engage communities in supporting and promoting the development of vulnerable children, youth and their families.

Objective 1.2 - Agencies providing child and youth services respect the rights of vulnerable children and youth, and promote children and youth in effectively participating in decisions about their life

Strategies

We will:

- work with child- and youth-serving agencies to ensure that consideration of the rights of children and youth are integrated into policies and practices, and that children and youth are active participants in the decision-making process;
- work with government bodies and agencies who serve vulnerable children and youth to review their dispute resolution processes, to determine their effectiveness and responsiveness in achieving timely and fair resolution of disagreements, and to advocate for changes where appropriate.

Objective 1.3 – Children and youth have access to expanded and enhanced advocacy supports and services

Strategies

We will:

- continue to deliver expanded and enhanced advocacy supports and services to children and youth in relation to designated government-funded services and programs;
- expand our work with communities to provide outreach, training and education to support the development of comprehensive community-based advocacy programs.

Objective 1.4 - Children and youth have access to advocacy services that reflect their unique culture, beliefs, values and needs

Strategies

We will:

- continue to consult with communities, including First Nations communities and Aboriginal peoples, to identify their needs for advocacy services and collaborate with them on the design and implementation of community advocacy programs that meet their needs;
- review and consider services and programs currently available, consult with immigrant communities to identify their needs for advocacy services, and work to design and implement relevant and effective advocacy services for British Columbia's growing population of immigrant children and youth.

Performance Measures	Targets		
	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11
Note: the table contains no number or percentage values, as we are developing and determining appropriate baseline percentages.			
Broad dissemination of information, materials and education about the rights of children and youth and available services	# of pamphlets, forums, workshops, speeches, presentations, learning events	# of pamphlets, forums, workshops, speeches, presentations, learning events	# of pamphlets, forums, workshops, speeches, presentations, learning events
Expanded advocacy services:			
• provided by the Office to children and youth and their families	Establish baseline	# children and youth served by the Office	# children and youth served by the Office
• provided by community-based organizations and Aboriginal communities	Establish baseline	# or % increase in community organizations and Aboriginal communities providing advocacy services	# or % increase in community organizations and Aboriginal communities providing advocacy services
Children, youth and their families provided advocacy services by the Office indicate satisfaction with the support and services received	Establish baseline	% increase in satisfaction rate	% increase in satisfaction rate

Goal 2 – The work of the Office supports improved outcomes for vulnerable children and youth, and progress from year to year in supporting optimal developmental milestones

Objective 2.1 – Monitoring, review and evaluation programs of the Office identify issues and make recommendations to improve results for vulnerable children and youth in key areas of safety, health, education and well-being

Strategies

We will:

- continue to undertake a thoughtful and focused monitoring program of observation, research, evaluation and review to assess designated services for children and youth, and prepare public reports that will be provided to the Legislative Assembly on the effectiveness, responsiveness and accountability of these services and programs;
- continue to monitor the timely implementation of the recommendations contained in the Hughes Review;
- engage and collaborate with other independent Officers of the Legislature and public bodies on matters of importance for children and youth.

Objective 2.3 – Promote adoption of a comprehensive Children's Plan that measures outcomes to promote improved results for vulnerable children and youth

Strategies

We will:

- continue to consult with child- and youth-serving ministries, and champion the development of an integrated, overarching Children's Plan that outlines key goals and outcomes for children and youth in British Columbia;
- ensure that such a plan has the support of all legislators, officials, the child-serving system and the private sector;
- encourage the development and acceptance of performance indicators to assess the overall health and well-being of vulnerable children and youth, and report annually to the Select Standing Committee on Children and Youth and the public.

Performance Measures	Targets		
	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11
Note: the table contains no percentage values, as we are developing and determining appropriate baseline percentages.			
Recommendations from monitoring and review activities accepted for implementation by child- and youth-serving agencies	% accepted	% accepted	% accepted
Collaborative reviews and reports undertaken with other independent Officers and public bodies	# of joint activities, projects, reviews, reports	# of joint activities, projects, reviews, reports	# of joint activities, projects, reviews, reports

Goal 3 - The work of the Office supports the right of children to be safe from violence, abuse and neglect, including from exposure to familial violence

Objective 3.1 - The Office's review and investigation of critical injuries and deaths of children and youth informs improvements to services, to aid in the prevention of similar injuries or deaths in the future

Strategies

We will:

- establish and maintain an effective and accountable child critical injury and child death review process to meet our statutory responsibility.
- work collaboratively with other public bodies to promote an integrated and accountable systemic approach to reviewing child deaths and injuries and to learning from reviews and investigations;
- undertake a review of current internal critical injury and child death review processes within the child- and youth-serving system, to ensure policies, practices and processes are fair and timely, and make recommendations to improve their effectiveness and responsiveness;
- research and identity best practices to inform our own child critical injury and death review and investigation process and to provide advice to with other public bodies.

Performance Measures	Targets		
	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11
Note: the table contains no percentage values, as we are developing and determining appropriate baseline percentages.			
Recommendations from critical injury and death reviews and investigations accepted for implementation by child- and youth-serving agencies	% accepted	% accepted	% accepted

Goal 4 - The Office delivers its mandate in a child-centred, open, collaborative, accountable and responsive way

Objective 4.1 - A diverse, competent and professional staff

Strategies

We will:

- ensure that staff have sufficient knowledge and resources and are supported through training and professional development;
- maintain a recruitment and succession strategy to ensure that staff are representative of the population served by the Office.

Objective 4.2 - Effective infrastructure, operations and practices to fulfill all mandates of the Office

Strategies

We will:

- maintain a strong presence throughout British Columbia to ensure access to our services;
- build and maintain public awareness - in particular with children and youth, their families, government ministries and relevant public bodies - about who we are, what we do , how we do it and how our services can be accessed;
- arrange regular meetings of the Children's Forum (includes the Representative, the Public Guardian and Trustee, the Ombudsman, the Chief Coroner, the Provincial Health Officer and the Provincial Director of Child Welfare) to ensure regular, open discussion and action on issues of concern related to children, youth and their families;
- develop, implement and maintain policies, procedures, practices and protocols that reflect our values of openness, transparency, efficiency, effectiveness, accountability and integrity of the Office.

Performance Measures	Targets		
	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11
Five-year review of Office of the Representative for Children and Youth to determine whether the functions of the Representative are still required to ensure the needs of children are met			Review undertaken by Standing Committee

Resource Summary

2008/09 Budget

The operating budget allocated to the Representative's office for 2008/09 is $6,558,000.00.

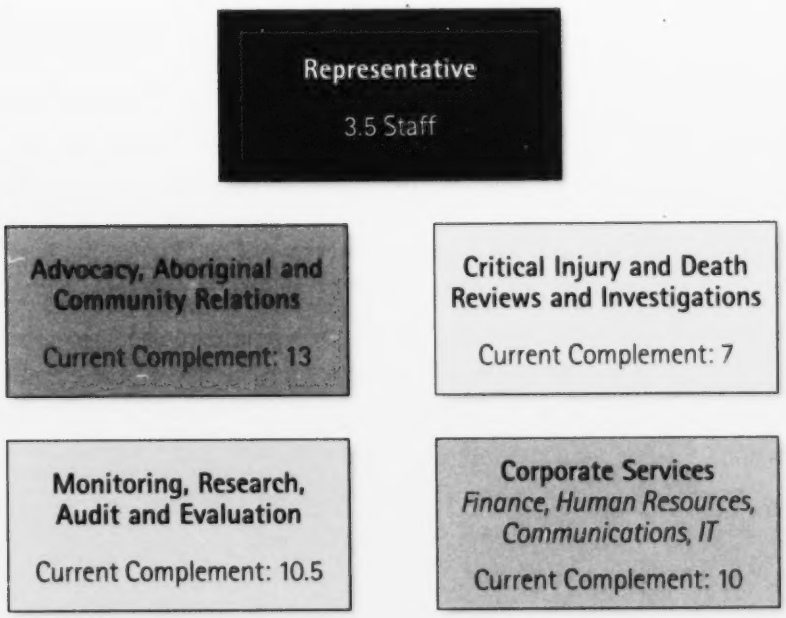
Organization

Currently, the FTE budget allocated to the Representative's office for 2008/09 is 44.

Based on a recently completed operational review, adjustments to roles and functions are currently underway to ensure the most effective and efficient delivery of the Office's mandate, however the current structure is reflected below.

Representative for Children and Youth

Organizational Structure



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